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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. TAVARES DE ALVAREZ (Dominican Republic)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. TSCHERING (Bhutan)
(Chairman)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 105: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Tschering (Bhutan), Mrs. Tavares de Alvarez (Dominican Republic), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/38, A/50/110, A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/257/Rev.1-E/1995/61/Rev.1, A/50/346, A/50/369, A/50/378, A/50/398, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/538, A/50/691, A/50/747-E/1995/126; A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued) (A/50/744)

1. Mr. AHMED (India) said that his Government had taken affirmative action to permit the political and economic empowerment of women. Amendments to the Indian Constitution had enabled women to participate actively in local self-government in both urban and rural areas. The National Commission for Women, which the Government was required to consult on all major issues, acted as an ombudsman for reviewing legal and constitutional safeguards and intervening in cases of violations.

2. The strategy for the economic empowerment of women in India took account of the fact that 90 per cent of India's working women were in the informal sector. Schemes and programmes had been set up to provide assistance, vocational training, credit, pensions and family benefits for women.

3. In education, the National Policy on Education required the national education system to give greater support to girls and reduce gender disparity. His Government had also instituted legislation to deal with domestic violence and regretted the emergence of new forms of terrorist violence against women in the world.

4. The international mass media carried an important responsibility, in that they were able to affect perceptions and policies; instead of projecting stereotypes, they should show greater sensitivity. Their role was therefore a critical area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. In an age of limitless communications, a greater symbiosis between the media of the South and the North would benefit all who used them. The United Nations, too, should ensure that all regions of the world, and not just developing countries, were addressed in its visual and verbal coverage of women's concerns.

5. Non-governmental and grass-roots organizations in India deserved special credit for their constructive role in highlighting women's concerns. The Government's development plans were drawn up in consultation with beneficiaries, and non-governmental organizations participated along with the Government in their implementation.

6. The eradication and the feminization of poverty needed to be addressed both nationally and internationally. In India, budget support for the social sector was currently twice what it had been in 1991-1992.

7. The Beijing Conference had demonstrated that there was overwhelming support for the economic and political empowerment of women, that there was a clear division between developing and developed countries in the emphasis they placed on development and social issues, and that violence against women was an area of universal concern. All the issues raised in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action needed to be addressed with equal attention at the international level.

8. While primary responsibility for implementation rested with Governments, there was a need to strengthen institutions such as the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which had done commendable research on women's issues, particularly in the developing world.

9. India had begun to implement the commitments it had made in Beijing by drawing up a National Policy on Women, earmarking 6 per cent of GNP for education and establishing a post of Commissioner for Women's Rights.

10. Mr. ALAWA (Kenya), referring to agenda item 107, said that the Constitution of Kenya guaranteed equality between men and women in all spheres of life and was the basis for legislation and policies aimed at improving the status of women. Kenya was a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was committed to ensuring the integration of gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development and to strengthening mechanisms to assess the impact of development policies on women. The current challenge to development planners in Kenya was to identify programmes that mainstreamed women's activities from the grass-roots level, consistent with the policy objectives set out in the Seventh Development Plan. The Government had demonstrated its commitment to women's issues by setting up a Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Culture and women's desks in other key sectors.

11. The review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had shown tangible gains in education and health. His Government had also endeavoured to implement the legal aspects of the Strategies by setting up a government task force to review laws relating to women. Additional punitive measures were deemed necessary to deal with all forms of violence against women.

12. His Government was committed to the World Health Organization's goal of health for all by the year 2000. It had increased life expectancy and reduced infant and maternal mortality. In the field of political and economic empowerment, it was committed to ensuring the promotion and support of women's business activities and women's participation in parliamentary and local elections. It had enacted laws giving men and women equal rights of inheritance and efforts were being made to intensify programmes to educate women voters. A number of women had been appointed to senior positions in the judiciary. Kenya was also committed to improving the quality of education for girls and had achieved equal enrolment numbers for primary schoolchildren of both sexes.

13. Some of the progress made by Kenya in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had been eroded by the adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes, the debt burden, unfavourable terms

of trade and poor meteorological conditions. His Government believed that continued cooperation between the Government, non-governmental organizations, the donor community and the United Nations system in supporting women's programmes in Kenya would ensure that progress could continue.

14. Turning to agenda item 165, he said that the Beijing Platform for Action would play an important role in accelerating the attainment of the objectives set forth in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. While the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform's strategic objectives lay with Governments, his delegation considered that a strong political commitment at the national, regional and international levels was required to mobilize substantial resources for the purpose, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries. Poverty eradication, social development and the protection of human rights were prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic and cultural progress.

15. His Government appealed to the international community, the multilateral financial institutions and the United Nations system to make concerted efforts to facilitate the speedy implementation of the Platform for Action. Any delay would mean an increase in female illiteracy and marginalization and more deaths in childbirth and armed conflict. Kenya was committed to involving urban and rural women in programmes geared to their advancement and to the promotion of peace, equality and development.

16. His delegation did not support the proposed merger of INSTRAW and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), both of which had an important role to play in the implementation of the Platform for Action. It strongly recommended that contributions to UNIFEM core resources should be doubled, in order to enable it to fulfil its mandate for the economic and political empowerment of women.

17. His delegation also considered that the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a high-level board of 15 to 20 eminent persons to advise him on the follow-up to the Beijing Conference would not facilitate speedy implementation of the Platform for Action. Instead, it recommended strengthening the role and mandates of the Commission on the Status of Women, INSTRAW, UNIFEM and the Economic and Social Council and supported the recommendation in the Platform for Action for the establishment of a high-level post of adviser on gender issues in the Office of the Secretary-General.

18. Mrs. VARGAS DE LOSADA (Colombia), speaking on agenda item 107, said that her Government was convinced of the urgent need to build a more equitable society based on equality of opportunities for men and women. Women in Colombia had made more progress than men in education and by the late 1980s had accounted for more than half of the population enrolled at all levels of education, including higher education. They had also contributed substantially to the labour market, without neglecting their traditional role in the home, although that double role was socially and economically undervalued and was under-registered in the national accounts. Women had played a fundamental role in the demographic changes which had taken place over the past few decades; the dramatic reduction in the birth rate had a positive influence on economic and social development.

19. Her Government was aware, however, that what it had accomplished was not sufficient and that there was a need to promote a comprehensive policy of gender equity. Accordingly, in 1994 it had adopted a policy which included among its objectives the promotion of cultural change, the introduction of a gender perspective in the management of development policies and programmes, the design and implementation of programmes and activities to improve the quality of life of the poorest women by removing the obstacles to their access to the benefits of development, and equitable participation by women in State and other decision-making bodies. The strategies for achieving those objectives included institutionalization of the bodies responsible for coordinating implementation of the gender equity policy at the different levels, the design of a national information plan to promote solidarity between men and women and create awareness of the importance of sharing household responsibilities and the strengthening of women's organizations in order to develop activities to implement and follow up the gender equity policy.

20. As a member of the Movement of Non-aligned Countries, Colombia renewed its commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, and reiterated its determination to ensure the advancement of women and its conviction that the full and equal participation of women in all areas of society was indispensable for equality, development and peace.

21. Mrs. FRITSCHE (Liechtenstein) said that implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action must take place at the national level, where Governments were to adopt specific policies for the achievement of full equality between women and men and to mainstream a gender perspective in all social, economic, political and cultural fields.

22. The internal formalities for Liechtenstein's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been concluded and her Government would thus be able to contribute to the goal of universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000. It was fully convinced of the need for both the provisions of the Convention and the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action which concerned the Convention. In the context of the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Liechtenstein supported the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women to work towards the elaboration of a draft optional protocol on a communication procedure. After becoming a State Party to the Convention, it would also examine the decision of the States Parties concerning the revision of article 20.1.

23. National mechanisms were to play a key role in establishing national policies for the implementation of the Platform for Action. Her Government had decided to create an additional national mechanism which would serve as a focal point for all issues related to the equality of women and coordinate all efforts in that field; support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas; and maintain contact with non-governmental organizations and work with them to implement the Platform for Action and national commitments.

24. On the international level, the follow-up to the Beijing Conference needed to be based on an integrated approach to women's issues, within the framework of

a coordinated follow-up to the major international conferences of the past few years, all of which had resulted in major achievements for the advancement of women. A system-wide approach, an effective coordination of efforts and an enhanced framework for international cooperation on gender issues were indispensable in that task. The provisions of the Platform for Action would also have to be included in other current United Nations activities, such as work on the Agenda for Peace and the agenda for development. More needed to be done within the United Nations Secretariat itself by giving priority to the recruitment and promotion of women, especially at the senior political and decision-making level. The proposed high-level post of an adviser to the Secretary-General should contribute to that goal.

25. Ms. GORDON (Jamaica) said that in Jamaica, the main problem confronting women, and society as a whole, was persistent poverty. The intensification of poverty in recent years had not only stifled opportunities for future generations, but actually reversed many of the hard-won gains made in the area of women's rights. Jamaica had therefore made poverty alleviation the highest priority on its national agenda. Since more than one third of Jamaican households were headed by women, even the implementation of policies not specific to women had an impact on them. Jamaica's national plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action focused mainly on the issues of poverty, violence against women and children, education and training, employment and inequality in power-sharing and decision-making. Those issues were also being addressed at the regional and international levels.

26. Her delegation wished to highlight the excellent work being done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the area of women's health and education in Jamaica. Jamaica was committed to maintaining the momentum and spirit of Beijing. It was only logical that the commitment at the international level should be just as serious, since Jamaica, like other countries, would need to draw on the support and advice of international, particularly United Nations, organizations in its implementation of the Platform for Action.

27. Jamaica viewed UNIFEM and INSTRAW as separate organizations with very different mandates which needed to be maintained. UNIFEM should retain its role of supporting projects to bring women directly into the development process and should continue to concentrate particularly on small projects which did not receive attention from other sources; it should also continue its autonomous relationship with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and not be merged with any other agency. The success of UNIFEM lay in its focused approach to the economic empowerment of women; if UNIFEM tried to tackle other aspects of the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, it would risk duplicating the work of other United Nations bodies and overloading its own work programme.

28. INSTRAW had a strategic role to play in respect of research and training on women's issues. Even within the tiny subregion of the Caribbean, there were many new concerns relating to women which had not been adequately researched from an international perspective. Jamaica agreed that INSTRAW should be strengthened; some of the research and training projects on women currently being undertaken by other United Nations bodies could be placed under the purview of INSTRAW, which should develop a close working relationship with

regional and national institutions, both governmental and non-governmental. Her delegation endorsed the recommendation that UNIFEM and INSTRAW should continue their cooperation with each other and with relevant United Nations organizations, each acting within its own mandate. Jamaica believed that with that coordinated and strengthened approach, it would be possible to achieve the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action.

29. Mrs. WAHEED-JUNEJO (Pakistan) said that the United Nations strategy for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must be firmly anchored on the two themes of system-wide coordination and a gender perspective identified in the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/744). The Economic and Social Council had a very active role to play in mainstreaming gender issues in the activities of all functional commissions and specialized agencies. It should encourage the functional commissions to formulate recommendations to that effect and should lead the way in ensuring faithful implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

30. The Commission on the Status of Women should be strengthened and designated as the focal point for follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Commission, supported by a strengthened and revitalized Division for the Advancement of Women, could play a central role in monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at the empowerment of women. The Economic and Social Council should increase the membership of the Commission and review the Commission's mandate to enable it to perform those functions. The Secretary-General's proposals regarding system-wide implementation must be considered very carefully and the overall costs and benefits of a high-level adviser or a high-level board must be compared.

31. The guidance given to other United Nations agencies was not adequate. The mandates given to INSTRAW, UNIFEM, the Department of Public Information and the Administrative Committee on Coordination were too general; their responsibilities and accountability needed to be clearly delineated. The development of key indicators, advocacy of women's issues, and coordination within the United Nations system and through UNDP resident representatives needed close monitoring by intergovernmental mechanisms.

32. The report of the Secretary-General did not provide full guidance on resources. The invitation extended to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to assist countries in implementing the Platform for Action had to be followed up through a consultative mechanism of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. The concessions made at the Beijing Conference on new and additional resources should not be lost; resources must be generated to achieve the strategic objective of the empowerment of women in all areas of life.

33. Her delegation believed that INSTRAW and UNIFEM were two separate entities with distinct mandates and that they should be strengthened; their merger would be counter-productive and would adversely affect the research and training activities currently being undertaken by INSTRAW. UNIFEM could gradually be developed as the lead agency for women's economic and political empowerment and human rights.

34. A new culture of cooperation, partnership and dialogue with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly those at the grass-roots level, was needed. The United Nations would have to upgrade its arrangements for consultation with NGOs and, at the national level, Governments would have to explore new mechanisms for cooperation with NGOs.

35. Her Government had adopted a multi-pronged strategy designed to put an end to discrimination against women, provide health care, education and employment opportunities for women and eliminate all forms of violence against women. It had taken steps to amend and repeal all discriminatory laws and had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in August 1995. Pakistan planned to launch a comprehensive programme for the advancement of women; one critical area of concern was to enable Pakistani women to establish themselves in business and industry by providing them with financial services regardless of their economic status or educational background.

36. Her delegation urged that the process for the prosecution of the crimes of rape committed by Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be expedited. Women and girls in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir continued to be subjected to gross, systematic, persistent and State-sponsored violence. International human rights organizations, Indian non-governmental organizations and Kashmiri human rights organizations had documented evidence of crimes of rape and sexual abuse, molestation and abduction by Indian security forces. India had spurned all requests for prosecution of the guilty parties. The international community must put pressure on India to support the investigation of the crimes committed and cooperate in the fair prosecution and trial of the persons responsible.

37. An overall environment for the advancement of women was created by strong political commitment, legal guarantees for the equal rights of women and men and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In the preliminary phase, the questions of access to education, health care and economic and financial resources were crucial. In the long run, the issue of the full participation of women in society should be the foremost objective.

38. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Holy See delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women, composed mainly of women from every region of the world and from a variety of backgrounds, had been pleased with major portions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The attention given to the girl child addressed the often-ignored fact that the status and well-being of women depended on the status accorded to them from the earliest stages of life. Education was an essential tool for achieving the goals of the Conference, and the Platform's success would depend on whether action to provide all girls and women with at least a basic education was taken seriously. The sections on poverty, education and resources for development were the very heart of the Platform; however, a sincere change of heart and behaviour on the part of affluent nations and social classes would be necessary to realize the corresponding objectives. Governments and other relevant sectors of society should be encouraged to back up the proposed actions with the necessary financial resources, so as to compensate for the absence of such a commitment in the document itself. Pope John Paul II had issued a special appeal to all Catholic education, health and other institutions to mobilize

their personnel and resources in order to meet the needs of girls and women, particularly the most disadvantaged.

39. The Holy See strongly endorsed measures to prevent violence against women. While significant public attention had rightly been given to domestic violence, the world community must not lessen its commitment to overcoming the suffering endured by millions of people, particularly women and children, in civil and international conflicts. Refugee women and children were having to cope not only with seemingly hopeless situations, but also with the fatigue of host countries and potential donors whose compassion and assistance were essential to their survival.

40. Unfortunately the Holy See had not been able to join in the consensus on the entire report of the Beijing Conference because of its strong disagreement with certain aspects of the document. While the human dignity inherent in women as well as men had been reaffirmed in the Declaration, the Holy See delegation had been dismayed at the strong opposition encountered by attempts to state that truth in the Platform for Action. To fail to recognize the importance of human dignity was to threaten the very basis upon which human rights were founded, as well as the conceptual basis for action against unjust discrimination and sexual, economic and other forms of human exploitation.

41. The section of the Platform for Action devoted to health afforded an unbalanced and superficial treatment of the major health needs of most of the world's women, especially the poorest women. Relatively scant attention was given to essential aspects such as access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation facilities and adequate housing. While provisions related to "reproductive health", "reproductive rights", and "unsafe abortion" were extensively presented, attempts to enumerate the measures needed to lower maternal morbidity and mortality rates had been rejected. The apparent obsession of some delegations with women's sexuality and with limiting reproduction was reflected in the emphasis given to those issues, while concrete means of addressing women's overall health needs that would require a financial commitment had been avoided or carefully qualified. An additional concern was ambiguous terminology that could imply an endorsement of certain sexual and reproductive practices that would have been unacceptable to a large number of delegations if stated explicitly. The ideological bias of many delegations which had resisted the proposal to inform women of the health risks related to hormonal contraception, promiscuity and abortion did not reflect a consensus, as evidenced by the extensive number of reservations made to certain paragraphs, including a statement by his own delegation.

42. The Holy See applauded the recognition given to the importance of the role of women in the family in caring for their children and other family members. It was important that the Platform for Action reaffirmed the family as being the basic unit of society, but disconcerting that a number of delegations had insisted on repeatedly qualifying "the family" as existing in various forms; such qualification could potentially undermine the commitment of the State and society to providing the family with protection and support, thereby jeopardizing the well-being of women and children within the family.

43. While reaffirming the unique role of women in the family, the Holy See also attached importance to the emphasis placed in the report of the Beijing Conference on the need for women to be present in social, economic and political life at the local, national and international levels. Effective follow-up measures were needed to ensure the right of women to enjoy equal opportunities and conditions with men in the workplace as well as in other structures of society. The reaffirmation of the universal nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms was a significant achievement. It was particularly significant that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized the importance of conscience and religion in the lives of women and men and affirmed those aspects both as human rights and as contributing to the advancement of women. It was therefore to be expected that those rights would be acknowledged in the practical implementation of those instruments.

44. The Holy See had associated itself with those aspects of the report which it considered to be positive and in the best interests of women; there was reason to hope that women themselves would overcome the limitations of the document.

45. Mrs. MEGURO (Japan) said that the achievements of the Fourth World Conference on Women had built on those of previous United Nations summits and conferences, including the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development.

46. It was regrettable that the documents required for the consideration of agenda item 165 had not been circulated in time; the recommendations for action contained in document A/50/744 should be taken up in detail at the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

47. The Beijing Platform for Action was an agenda for the empowerment of women, and her delegation was pleased that it referred to women as agents rather than beneficiaries. It was extremely important to move women from the periphery to the centre of society. That did not mean reversing the positions of women and men or simply inviting women to the centre of a male-centred structure, but rather redesigning the structure of gender relations. Her delegation attached great importance to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes at the community, national, regional and international levels. It strongly believed that a gender perspective should be considered in relation to all issues, not just "women's issues", and should not be used merely as a political tool. Gender concerns cut across other issues and should be a primary consideration in addressing all matters of global concern.

48. Her delegation was convinced that women's rights were human rights and included the right of women to have control over their sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Violence against women was a violation of their human rights and was a universal problem; its eradication was therefore an urgent and important goal. Japan intended to strengthen its efforts to support national and community action to that end through organizations of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

49. Under the Platform for Action, Governments had primary responsibility for implementation. Her delegation also recognized the important role played by United Nations resident coordinators in developing countries. Japan had launched an initiative on women in development (WID) in connection with its official development assistance programme, with the purpose of supporting the efforts of developing countries to advance the status of women. It had disbursed approximately $1 billion for WID projects in 1994 and intended to continue to increase such assistance in the future. It had also intensified its efforts to support the activities of the United Nations system in that field. In the United Nations, it was important to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and measures; gender issues should be dealt with by all United Nations bodies and coordination and monitoring were clearly needed.

50. The Commission on the Status of Women should play a central role in monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action and in assisting the Economic and Social Council with the coordination of reporting on the progress made. The Council should incorporate gender issues into its discussion of all policy matters, and Japan welcomed its proposal to dedicate one high-level segment and one coordination segment before the year 2000 to the advancement of women. It was essential, in order effectively to coordinate the activities of the United Nations system, to establish an effective focal point for women's issues. The system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1995-2001, should also be revised to reflect the Platform for Action. Lastly, the number of women in senior posts within the Organization needed to be increased. Regarding the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a high-level advisory board on the advancement of women, Japan believed that certain points, such as the relationship between the board and the Commission on the Status of Women, the board's terms of reference, the financial implications and indeed the need for such a board, must first be clarified.

51. Japan wished to highlight the important role played by non-governmental organizations and all actors in civil society. Japan had always promoted communication with non-governmental organizations and to that end, had appointed an NGO representative as a member of its delegation to the Third Committee. Japan looked forward to the establishment of a more mature and equal partnership between Governments and with non-governmental organizations through enhanced mutual understanding and joint action.

52. Mr. Tshering (Bhutan) took the Chair.

53. Mr. LAMPTEY (Ghana) said that a clear message had emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women, namely, that the time had come to recognize the advancement of women as an essential condition for social and economic progress in the world and gender equality as a fundamental human right. Participants had shown in their statements that the problems facing women and the obstacles to their advancement were almost identical the world over, differing only in their degree of intensity. That realization had made possible the consensual outcome of the Conference.

54. The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations was an opportune occasion to assess what the Organization had achieved for the cause of women. The three women's conferences that had preceded Beijing had contributed to the progressive

strengthening of the legal, economic, social and political role of women in the world, yet women had remained the primary victims of poverty, sickness, discrimination, unemployment, marginalization, violence and armed conflict. Much had been expected of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, but little had been achieved. It was now vital to mobilize the necessary zeal and will to ensure that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were implemented. Governments would need to enhance the effectiveness of national machinery for the advancement of women and it would be necessary to establish institutions responsible for integrating gender analysis into policies and programmes.

55. In Ghana, a delegation of women was to submit proposals for the implementation of the Platform for Action to the cabinet by the end of November 1995. Seminars were being held to disseminate the conclusions of the Conference and to discuss the 12 critical areas of concern. There were plans to create a women's bank with a view to enhancing women's economic independence and boosting their entrepreneurial endeavours. The First Lady had recently called for affirmative action by all political parties to ensure that women constituted at least 40 per cent of the membership of Parliament after the 1996 elections. Such small but concrete actions had to be replicated in homes and communities. The age-old cultural and religious practices which hindered women's advancement had to be discarded. That did not require financial resources, but simply a change of attitude. Nevertheless, the allocation of resources would be essential for the effective implementation of the Platform for Action.

56. The Platform for Action had assigned a role not only to States, but also to the agencies of the United Nations system, financial institutions and civil society. In particular, it had called for the strengthening of the United Nations mechanisms dealing with women's issues. It would be the responsibility of the Secretary-General to ensure that all the bodies identified in the Platform worked in a mutually supportive and effective manner. It was regrettable, therefore, that certain proposals in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the outcome of the Conference (A/50/744) cast doubt upon the manner in which he intended to accomplish that task. First, while the report recognized the new, expanded role of the Division for the Advancement of Women, no provision had been made for its additional responsibilities in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. Second, while the Conference had requested the Secretary-General to establish a high-level post of adviser on gender issues in his office, in his report he stated that it would be inappropriate to request funding for the creation of such a post. However, in the same report, he proposed the establishment of a high-level board to advise him on the advancement of women. If no appropriation was available for a post of adviser, his delegation wondered where the money would come from for an entire board. Nevertheless, it supported the majority of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report and believed that if they were effectively and faithfully implemented, they would contribute immensely to the well-being of the world's women.

57. Mr. PACE (Malta) said that in the 20 years since the first United Nations conference on women, the campaign for women's equality had brought about undeniable advances: Governments were adopting legislation that acknowledged women's right to equal opportunities and, as a result, women were increasingly present in the labour market and in public life and enjoyed better access to

health care and education. Nevertheless, women continued to face disadvantages, and sometimes discrimination, in various spheres.

58. Women were still not present in adequate numbers at the decision-making level. That situation placed a great responsibility on senior officials, who must ensure that women were consulted about their needs and priorities. It must be recalled that the social differences between women and men were in large measure shaped by society, rather than being inevitable: strongly felt and well-defined expectations about the appearance, qualities, behaviour and work appropriate to women or men were still common. Different approaches had been adopted to achieving equality for women and men. The free-market approach whereby individuals were left to cope as best they could with what skills and resources they had only served to perpetuate inequality. In most instances, equality of opportunity had to be supported by legislation. The concept of discrimination had evolved to include not only intentional discrimination by biased individuals, but also systematic discrimination which had an unintentional negative impact on women. Consequently, it was now recognized that not only education to change individual attitudes but also changes in organizational policies and practices were necessary to remedy discrimination.

59. In order to achieve equality between women and men, changes in three key areas were required. In the field of employment, the main goals for women included equal salaries, equal job and promotion opportunities, and involvement in trade unions and other social institutions. Within the family, it was essential that women's equal right to make decisions regarding the family and to work outside the home be recognized. Women's unpaid work should be acknowledged and husbands should take on a greater share of family responsibilities and household chores. Lastly, in the field of decision-making, women should be adequately represented in parliament, local councils, the senior civil service and the judiciary. If those goals were to be achieved, the barriers of prejudice, lack of education and lack of confidence must be overcome.

60. Throughout the past decade, his Government had adopted legislation to guarantee women equal participation at all levels of society and had encouraged, through education and incentives, the changes required to achieve equality for women and men.

61. Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus) said that, during the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women, a clear picture had emerged of the situation of women world wide and of the problems they faced. Subsequently, during the Conference, strategic goals and measures had been defined. Now, the most challenging phase, that of practical action, had begun. Governments undoubtedly bore primary responsibility for the successful implementation of the commitments made at Beijing, but given the international character of the problems outlined in the Platform for Action, it was clear that the United Nations must play a coordinating role. That would necessitate, in turn, a review of the activities of the United Nations bodies dealing directly with women's issues, for instance, the Commission on the Status of Women. His delegation fully supported the proposal by the Polish delegation to broaden the mandate of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the Eastern European region. The problems facing women in countries with economies in transition merited the most serious consideration by the Fund.

62. In countries with economies in transition, women were losing the advantages which they had enjoyed under a planned economy. Despite the absence of formal discrimination, women had experienced to a greater degree than men the adverse effects of the institutional, structural and political changes in those countries and, paradoxically, had almost no influence over the course of those changes.

63. The social and economic crisis in Belarus had severely limited the Government's capacity to implement the objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action. Nevertheless, the process of establishing an executive structure with responsibility for formulating, coordinating and implementing a policy for the advancement and social protection of women during the transitional period was nearing completion.

64. The problem of women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions in Belarus deserved particular attention. Over the past decade, the proportion of women in the labour force had risen significantly and yet few women had reached the senior managerial level in either the private or the State sector. Furthermore, women who reached those positions were hindered by the absence of specifically female managerial styles and by a lack of self-confidence. The priority formerly given to the manufacturing industry had limited the emergence of senior women managers. By contrast, the transition to a market economy had enhanced the roles of economists, lawyers, sociologists and teachers, professions where women predominated. That development would broaden the pool of women available for selection to senior management posts.

65. His delegation hoped that the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international structures would extend the necessary assistance to the countries with economies in transition. In particular, a comprehensive programme of action to improve the situation of women in those countries must be adopted.

66. Ms. VADIATI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the advancement of women and the achievement of equality and equity between women and men were prerequisites for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. The empowerment of women was essential to the achievement of political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security for all. Such crucial goals required the determination of all members of the human community, the commitment of Governments world wide and widespread international cooperation.

67. The Fourth World Conference on Women had provided an occasion to investigate critical obstacles to the advancement of women. While certain aspects had received widespread attention, the Platform for Action had inherent weaknesses, as could be seen from the large number of reservations entered to it. Nevertheless, her country affirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Platform for Action with full respect for Islam and the ethical values of society.

68. Violence against women was an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. Certain groups of women, such as those belonging to minorities or living in situations of armed conflict, were particularly

vulnerable. Trafficking in women was a global industry that transcended borders and cultures; like prostitution, it flourished, because of the increasing numbers of women living in absolute poverty, and strong measures by Governments and international organizations were needed to combat it.

69. Throughout the world, the numbers of elderly women were increasing; many of them faced problems in such areas as nutrition, health, working conditions and violence. Measures to protect them against discrimination and to promote their participation in society were urgently needed. The situation of women in rural areas was also a key element in development policy. Her Government had taken a number of important steps in that respect, with the result that illiteracy among rural women had fallen steeply since 1976 and the number of rural girls attending school had increased significantly.

70. Women's participation at the executive and managerial levels, including in key policy-making positions, had increased in her country, as had the number of organizations engaged in activities related to women's concerns. The literacy gap between women and men was narrowing and the numbers of women graduating from university and occupying teaching posts in higher education had almost doubled in the past six years. The proportion of women government employees had increased to 26.5 per cent and women were increasingly occupying specialized positions in the public sector, particularly in ministries such as health, culture and higher education.

71. Despite growing difficulties, the international community had taken effective steps for the advancement of women and the future looked bright for the status of women world wide. A more sustainable, prosperous and secure world could be created for them through the implementation of the relevant instruments, with due respect for the diversity and ethical values of different societies.

72. Mr. SAKONHNINHOM (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that equal rights for both sexes was an essential condition for social justice, development and peace. Sustained economic growth and sustainable development required the involvement of women and men on an equal footing, as both beneficiaries and agents.

73. Although recent international conferences had added considerable momentum to international efforts to improve the status of women as the new millennium approached, much remained to be done. Grave violations of women's fundamental rights continued to take place in certain parts of the world and their equal participation in political decision-making was still a distant goal. In the interest of achieving a more just and equitable world, measures must be taken to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and to remove the obstacles which prevented them from attaining equal rights and opportunities.

74. His Government attached great importance to promoting the fundamental rights of Lao women. Taking into account national realities and the intrinsic characteristics of Lao society, his Government was sparing no effort to that end, and the 1991 Constitution, as well as much of the country's recent legislation, guaranteed women's fundamental rights. Women of different ethnic groups were playing a vital role in the country's development and many of them

were employed in industry, health, education and government. The Union of Lao Women, founded in 1955, was assisting the Government in improving women's quality of life through projects in such areas as education and training, health and instruction in foreign languages and had drawn up a strategic programme for the development and advancement of women to the year 2000.

75. A new era of international cooperation had begun. Women in his country, like women everywhere, longed to live in peace and dignity, free from all forms of discrimination and exploitation, and were prepared to cooperate in any international action for the attainment of gender equality.

76. Mr. SY (Observer for the Organization of African Unity (OAU)) expressed dissatisfaction that documents on an item as important as the Fourth World Conference on Women had not been made available to delegations and at the manner in which the Secretariat had handled the issue procedurally.

77. OAU continued to commit itself to efforts for the advancement of women. Numerous regional conferences and instruments had contributed to establishing the necessary institutional and legal framework for such efforts in Africa. In addition, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had broken new ground for women the world over, and particularly for women in Africa, by recognizing the immense contribution which they could make to economic structures, policy-making and the overall development process.

78. Because conflict situations had a disproportionate impact on women, OAU continued to place peace and stability at the top of its agenda. Without peace there could be no sustainable development. In cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa, OAU had organized a Regional Conference on Women, Peace and Development which had adopted the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace. It had continued to join with other institutions in efforts to eradicate discriminatory practices against girls and women in Africa and to promote gender equity.

79. The commitments made at Beijing could not be translated into tangible results without the necessary resources. That issue should be given serious consideration because of the priority which Governments attached to the advancement of women. Meaningful action by the international community to solve the debt problem, which was stifling any prospect of short-term economic and social development in Africa, was urgently needed.

80. The strengthening of institutional capacity was another important issue. His delegation agreed that effective follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action required a system-wide review of efficiency and policy coordination. Accordingly, his delegation strongly supported the idea of creating a high-level post of adviser on gender issues in the United Nations Secretariat. In that connection, consideration was being given to upgrading the Women's Unit of OAU to a division and efforts were being made to recruit and promote qualified women to senior-level posts in OAU.

81. At the national level, increased efforts should be made, in cooperation with non-governmental and civic organizations, to disseminate the Platform for Action widely at all levels of society. Governments should reallocate resources

to such areas as health and education, particularly for the girl child. Lastly, OAU renewed the appeal to international bodies and funding agencies to provide additional resources for the implementation of the Platform for Action.

82. Mr. MOUSKY (Observer for the International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that of the 125 million migrants, refugees and displaced persons in the world, at least 50 million international migrants were women. Their problems were of deep concern to IOM, which was endeavouring to increase awareness and understanding of the needs of migrant women, promote equal access for women to projects and services targeting migrants, and design and implement women-specific migrant projects and services. IOM sought to empower migrant women at every step in the process.

83. The migrant women who benefited from IOM programmes came from a wide variety of regions and social backgrounds. The methods and means through which those women were empowered must be responsive to local realities.

84. One issue of particular concern to IOM was trafficking in women. Numerous cases of such criminal activity and related abuse had been reported from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and, most recently, Eastern Europe. Migrant trafficking was a growing trend within irregular migration flows. IOM was giving priority to the issue of protecting and assisting the victims of trafficking, both in its research and forum activities and in planning its operational programmes. Regional and subregional studies and seminars had helped to increase awareness and understanding of the issue and IOM field missions around the world had been closely following incidents of and trends in trafficking in women.

85. Other components of the IOM programme included campaigns to disseminate information to potential migrants on the risks and pitfalls of trafficking, technical cooperation with Governments and return and reintegration assistance for victims of trafficking.

86. The work of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action had only just begun. IOM looked forward to taking an active part in international efforts to eliminate violence against migrant women and to meet their other special needs, thereby enabling them to progress towards full equality and empowerment.

AGENDA ITEM 105: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/C.3/50/L.12/Rev.1)

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.12/Rev.1

87. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.12/Rev.1, entitled "Towards full integration of persons with disabilities in society: implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and of the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond", which had no programme budget implications.

88. Mrs. LIMJUCO (Philippines) said that Australia, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden and Tunisia had become sponsors of the draft resolution. On behalf of the sponsors she proposed the following revisions to the text of the draft resolution: in the third line of paragraph 2, the word "all" should be deleted; in the first line of paragraph 8, the words "the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development" should be added after "the Secretary-General"; and in the third line of paragraph 8, the words "facilitate the collection and transmission of relevant data to be used to" should be added after "their efforts to".

89. The draft resolution, as orally revised, was adopted.

90. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it take note of the following documents: A/50/84-E/1995/12 (Report of the Secretary-General containing the interim report on the world social situation) and A/50/473 (Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons).

91. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.